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A Forward Mission Movement in North Korea



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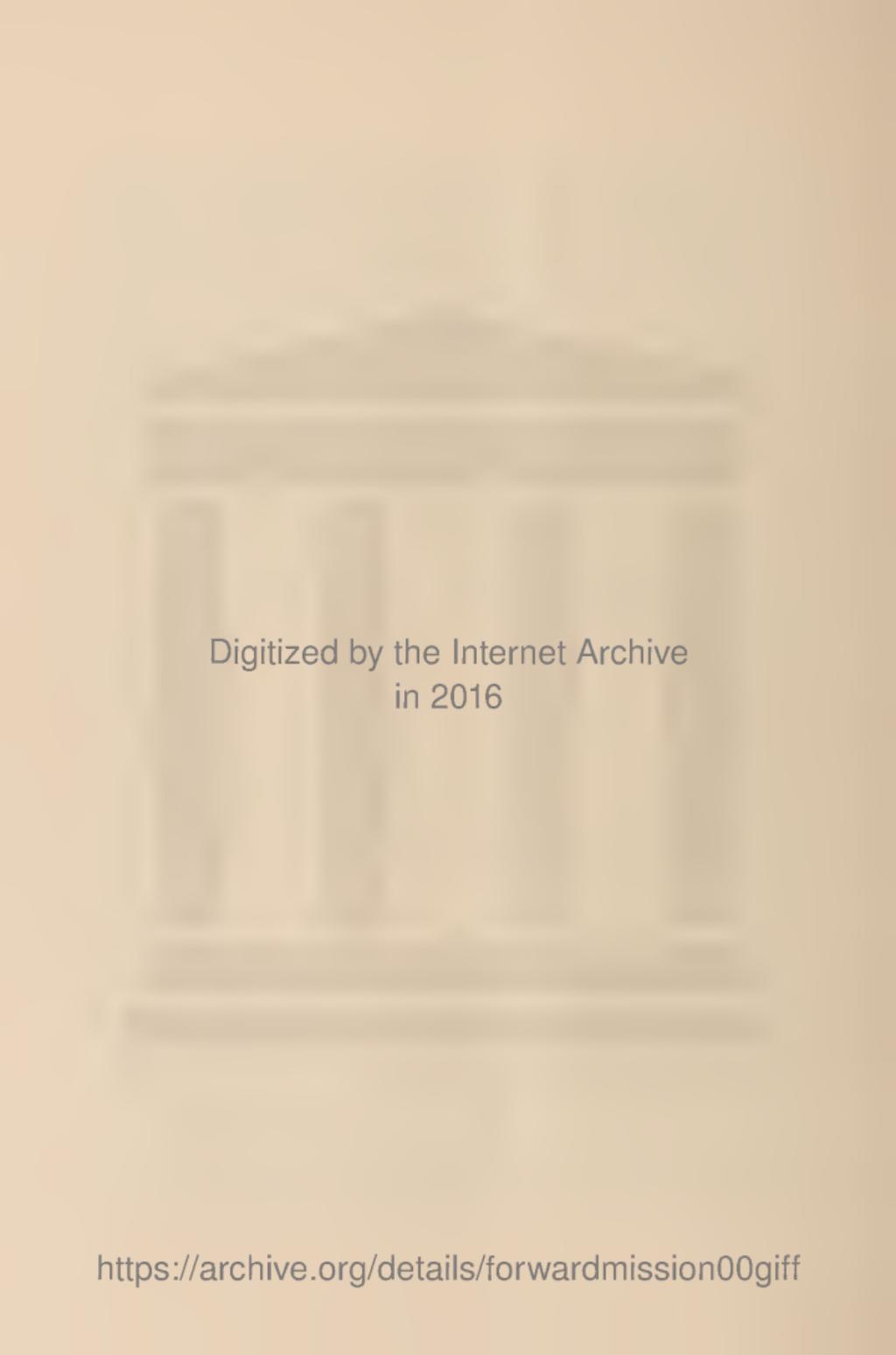


BY

REV. DANIEL L. GIFFORD



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A FORWARD MISSION MOVEMENT IN NORTH KOREA



The name of the city of Pyeng Yang, under half a dozen forms of spelling, is now world-famous as the scene of one of the most decisive battles in the recent Chino-Japanese war. It may be well to mention that the name of the city is pronounced Ping Yang. It is by far the most important city in the north of Korea, located perhaps 180 miles to the north of Seoul, the capital, upon the Tatong river, and said to have had in the days before the war a population of 100,000 people. Its history carries us back to the times of King David, when the Chinese statesman Keja, in the vicissitudes of a political career, found the climate of the "Land of Morning Calm" better suited to his health, and with a retinue of followers he settled among the aborigines of Korea, in what became the city of Pyeng Yang, with the result that from this center radiated throughout the land the relatively superior civilization of China. One gets a curious composite impression of ancient and modern history in visiting the grave of Keja, situated just north of the city;

upon the top of a knoll the semi-globular grave, with a low, tiled stone wall half surrounding it, and stone images and a sacrificial slab in front of the mound, reminding one of a far antiquity; then the wooden shrine, below the knoll, with its walls scarred and perforated in every direction by the bullets of the battle which raged over the site, very much in evidence of the recent past. During the making of the nation the capital of the country had a wandering life, the most ancient of whose sites, however, was the city of Pyeng Yang. In later days and until the present, the city has been the provincial capital of Pyeng An Do, the most northwestern of the eight provinces into which the country until recently has been divided. Again the city is by far the most important commercial center in the north of Korea. The people are handsome, spirited, energetic, with much force and strength of character, which makes them a power either for good or for evil. Indeed in the past Pyeng Yang had the reputation for being the wickedest city in the country; one symptom of which was the fact that the city was famed the whole country over for the number of its fair but frail dancing girls, whose numbers, it is said, have not infrequently been recruited from the more important and influential families of the city. How cruelly the

poor city has been punished, however, is evidenced by the great swathes of vacant house sites, here and there visible within the ancient walls, where the homes of the people were razed to the ground by the war. "Yangbans," or the aristocratic leisure class, are rare in the city and region. Roman Catholicism has made nothing like the impression in this region that it has in the southern provinces.

There are a number of view-points from which it would be interesting to consider quite at length the city of Pyeng Yang; but sufficient I think has been mentioned to indicate the importance of the city as a strategic point from which to do religious work. As a rather wonderful religious movement has sprung up in this northern section of the country, it will be well to confine our attention to the opening of missionary work in Pyeng Yang and its vicinity.

In the early days of the Presbyterian Mission North, Rev. H. G. Underwood, D.D., on one or two occasions, accompanied by Rev. H. G. Appenzeller of the Methodist Mission, made six different visits to the city, while on his way to and from Eui Ju, in the northwestern corner of the country, where he had work started. On each of these occasions he spent some time in preaching and selling Christian books; and at

one time he had a couple of colporteurs located in Pyeng Yang. Upon the departure of Dr. Underwood to America in the spring of 1891, the work in the north fell to the portion of Rev. S. A. Moffett. For a couple of years Mr. Moffett made spring and fall trips to Eui Ju, spending some time on each occasion in Pyeng Yang. By 1892 the Presbyterian Mission had reached the conclusion that Pyeng Yang, in preference to Eui Ju, was the center where eventually they hoped to open their station for the work in the north; and accordingly in the summer of that year Mr. Moffett located his helper, Mr. Han Sok Chin, there to do preliminary work. Mr. Moffett's policy was to win his way in gradually.

In February, 1893, property was secured for Mr. Han, with rooms that could be occupied upon their visits by Mr. Moffett and Rev. Graham Lee, who had joined him as a colleague in this northern work. The Methodist Mission in the person of W. J. Hall, M.D., also bought buildings at the same time. While the people of the city showed a friendly disposition, the city magistrate and his underlings disliked the presence of foreigners in the city and stirred up trouble. Messrs. Moffett and Lee thought it wise to give way before the storm, returned the property bought for their helper outside the city, and quietly withdrew. But

it was not long before their helper, Mr. Han, had again bought property, this time inside the East Gate, near the present site of the Pyeng Yang church, where in the fall of the same year Mr. Moffett quietly returned to spend the winter, this time being quite unmolested by the officials of the city.

The winter was spent by Mr. Moffett and his helper in daily work, which could hardly be called preaching so much as familiar conversation with individuals or groups of men wherever they met them, whether in Mr. Moffett's room, where most of the work was done, or upon the streets in and around the city. And the especial themes to which the conversation was ever brought around, were what the Bible has to say on sin and the personal need of salvation through Christ. And it is worthy of note, as one explanation of the wide spread of Christian work throughout that northern region from Pyeng Yang as a center, that of those who became Christians, many, whether from precept or example, quickly adopted the spirit and methods of Mr. Moffett and his helper in the constant, aggressive "hand-picking" of souls. Let it be observed that the Holy Spirit ever continues to bless the faithful, persistent, personal presentation of the teachings of the Bible upon these great themes of sin and salva-

tion through the blood of Christ. There was also a wide sale and distribution of Scriptures and other Christian books. This time, in short, was a period of widespread seed-sowing. Nor was this all. Mr. Moffett now commenced the systematic and careful instruction of a group of "catechumens" or applicants for baptism, that began to gather about them as the result of their evangelistic work. In January, 1894, Mr. Moffett had the joy of receiving into the church by baptism seven men and at the same time formally enrolling as catechumens two others, one of whom, a Mr. Han, from Anak, in Whang Hai Do, the next province to the south, I shall have occasion to mention again, in referring to the spread of the work into the northern part of that province. These men began at once to tell others what they had learned of the Gospel truth. The last of April Mr. Moffett returned to Seoul.

About the 7th of May, 1894, Dr. Hall of the Methodist Mission, with his wife, his little boy and his household goods, arrived in Pyeng Yang and moved into the house he had previously purchased. The second night after their arrival began the persecution ever memorable in the history of the work in Pyeng Yang. Seven of the native Christians were holding their regular prayer-meeting in the evening in the room of Mr.

Moffett's helper, Mr. Han, when into their midst strode a number of official servants of the magistracy and proceeded to beat them, one of the servants using a ragged piece of cord-wood. They then produced the red cords used for the tying of criminals and pinioned their arms behind their backs. They stated that the order had come from the King to kill them all for being Christians. Then they started with the party for the city prison, taking with them from the house next door the man who had sold to Mr. Han the house then occupied by him. On the way all were released with the exception of Mr. Han and the former owner of the house, whom they threw into prison.

The same night some one brought word to Dr. Hall that about one o'clock A. M. some one had knocked on the window of his helper, Mr. Kim Chang Sikie, saying that the Doctor had called him. Mr. Kim promptly opened the door, when he was seized, beaten and carried off to prison. The owner of the house bought by Dr. Hall was also seized and imprisoned the same night, and the following forenoon one of the Methodist Christians was also arrested. Early that morning Dr. Hall went to see the Governor, but was told that he was sleeping. Going to the prison he found the men with their feet stretched apart

and fastened in stocks, in such a manner as to cause them intense pain. The Doctor telegraphed the situation to Seoul, the capital. During the day the prisoners were beaten and money or promissory notes to considerable amounts were extorted from them by the brutal jailers. A paper came from the officials ordering Dr. Hall out of his house. Later in the day the Doctor again sought an interview with the Governor; but he refused to see him or grant him any protection. In the course of the afternoon came telegrams stating that the English and American legations (Dr. Hall was a British subject) would require the Foreign Office to order the release of the men and the granting of protection to Dr. Hall and his family. Then a runner from the magistracy appeared demanding the paper brought by him in the morning from the officials ordering Dr. Hall out of his house. They saw they had gone too far in assuming jurisdiction over a foreigner. The Doctor refused to give it. The runner stamped about in a rage and finally seized Dr. Hall's servant by the top-knot, beat him, kicked him and ordered him taken to prison. The Doctor then let him have the paper, and the man went away satisfied.

Night settled down over that harassed missionary home and the group of tortured, bleeding

Christians in the filthy prison; and what earnest prayers must have risen to God that night for deliverance. In the course of the evening crash came a great stone through the paper window of Mrs. Hall's room. But we are told that God so put his peace into those missionary hearts that they had refreshing sleep. In the morning the water carriers were forbidden to bring water to Dr. Hall's house. A lying report came to them through an official servant that a telegram had come from Seoul stating that the American and English ministers had seen the King, and as the result of the interview, among other things, the order had been sent to the Governor to behead all the Christians. Dr. Hall on visiting the prison found that this much was true, the prisoners had been removed to the death cell, where criminals soon to be executed are confined. All day they were threatened, beaten and tortured in the stocks. They tried to make Kim, Han and the other Christians renounce their Christianity; but with the faith of the martyrs they steadily refused. Then to Dr. Hall came the rumor that the Governor, who on account of his being a member of the powerful Min family, to which the Queen belonged, did not fear punishment, and was about to telegraph to the capital that these men were all Tong Haks, or members of the

rebel party then rising throughout the country.

In Seoul all this news as it was telegraphed was very disquieting to the missionary community; and at five o'clock that afternoon a special prayer-meeting of Methodist and Presbyterian missionaries met at the house of the Rev. Dr. Underwood. In the meantime energetic action was being taken by the legations. The British Consul-General, Mr. C. T. Gardiner, a diplomat of thirty years' experience in China, strongly backed by the able American Minister, Mr. J. M. B. Sill, brought heavy and repeated pressure to bear upon the Foreign Office, demanding the immediate release of the employes and Christians. And the missionaries had barely gotten home to their suppers from that prayer-meeting when the glad news came over the wires that the prisoners had been released. The next morning at day-break Mr. Moffett and Mr. McKenzie, the Nova Scotian Presbyterian missionary, with chairs and extra coolies started for Pyeng Yang, to travel night and day. But to take up the thread of the story in Pyeng Yang. The night previous, while the men were still in prison, word came summoning them before the acting-magistrate of the city. Apparently it meant that they were to be executed. They were brought before him and made to kneel in his presence. He ordered them to

renounce their connection with the foreigners and to revile the name of God. The two house owners who made no pretensions to Christianity gladly complied. And one Christian, who had not known the truth long, under the terrible ordeal abjured his faith. But the two Christian helpers with the faith of a Paul and a Stephen refused to do so. Instead of being led without the city to their execution, however, after being beaten they were released. As they started to go an official servant, who had been one of the prime movers in the persecution, set up the cry, "They are all Christians, and no matter if they are killed." Thereupon the whole pack of yamen-runners started after them with stones. Two of the Christians escaped down side streets and were not pursued; but Mr. Kim, Dr. Hall's helper, was stoned all the way home, and staggering into the presence of Mr. Hall, sank to the floor nearly lifeless. Mention should be made here of a school teacher by the name of Yi, who was at that time living in a village ten miles out from the city. He was a Christian and a friend of Mr. Han, the helper. While the persecution was at its height, word came to him of what was transpiring in Pyeng Yang, and he immediately declared his intention of going into the city. His friends protested that should he do so he was liable to be

killed. "I cannot help it," was his reply. "Mr. Han is my friend and I am going in to help him. If Mr. Han dies, and the need should exist, I will die with him." But by the time he reached the city the prisoners had been released. In Soon An, some eighteen miles north of the city, there had previously been a class of twenty inquirers. When news of the troubles in progress reached there, all but three men renounced what little faith they had and these three hurried into the city to learn the truth regarding the disquieting rumors. As these three men afterwards did a notable work, mention will be made of them further on.

After the release of the prisoners things became quiet. Messrs. Moffett and McKenzie presently appeared upon the scene and entered upon an investigation of the affair. The authorities were temporarily cowed. Dr. Scranton of the Methodist Mission arrived later and Dr. Hall and family under the instructions of the British Consul-General withdrew with him to Seoul. Mr. McKenzie also took his departure. Few people outside of the Christians were coming to see Mr. Moffett and his helper.

It was drawing into the heat of June and the yamen-runners were still muttering their threats, when, partly to get a change from the stifling

city, partly to look after country work, and partly to see what would be done by the authorities in his absence, Mr. Moffett paid a visit of a week to Anak, in the next province south, where he stayed holding meetings at the house of Mr. Han, mentioned above as a promising catechumen. After his return the people about the magistracy, finding that no further notice had been taken in Seoul of their maltreatment of people in the employ of the foreigners, became emboldened and threatened openly to kill all the Christians in Pyeng Yang as soon as Mr. Moffett left, and sometimes going so far as to threaten the life of Mr. Moffett himself. Upon one of these occasions a Mr. Choi, a notable example of the power of the Gospel to change a reprobate into a decent God-fearing man, together with another Christian, took fright and ran off to the country. But after wandering about for a day, their consciences smote them so that they returned to the city prepared for any fate.

About this time came the opening of the Chino-Japan war. The news of the occupation of the capital and the taking of the palace by Japanese troops created a perfect panic among the citizens of Pyeng Yang. The Christians alone were calm and went boldly about the city urging men to put their trust in God. People kept com-

ing to Mr. Moffett for the news. Women thronged the quarters of helper Han's family as a refuge from their fears. It was so quiet and peaceful there, they said, while outside all was wailing and confusion. This peaceful frame of mind of the Christians made a considerable impression upon the people of Pyeng Yang. It was now becoming really dangerous for Mr. Moffett to be away from the capital; but so long as the threat of death hung over the Christians, he felt it wrong to leave them. The American Minister now brought such pressure to bear upon the Foreign Office that the authorities in Pyeng Yang were compelled to refund all the money that had been extorted from the prisoners and all the expenditures necessitated in telegraphing and in special trips to and from the capital, amounting to 500 yen (about (\$250), which amount was paid by Governor Min; and a form of punishment was inflicted upon the three men most guilty or their substitutes. This broke the back of the opposition and no more threats were heard. News of this vindication of the rights of the missionary and his employes spread all over the country and, if the expression may be allowed, stock in his religion showed an upward tendency.

Soon after this the Chinese army poured into Pyeng Yang. The position of Mr. Moffett had

become precarious. Although he did not know it, only a short time previous Rev. James Wylie, a Scotch Presbyterian missionary, had been murdered in Manchuria by these same troops. He remained close in his room. His servant brought in the word that Japanese heads were impaled above the city gates, and all with their hair cut, even to Korean Buddhist priests, were being beheaded on suspicion of being spies. Presently the Korean Christians held a prayer-meeting and at its close adjourned in a body to urge Mr. Moffett to leave the city, as his presence there was now no longer necessary to their safety. That night he called on the Chinese telegraph operator, who knew him, and through his mediation procured an interview with the Chinese general, as the result of which the general gave orders to put up a notice granting protection to the "Christian chapel" and detailed a squad of soldiers who escorted him on his way to the capital and incidentally seized a city farther south, from which point the party proceeded unattended.

Mr. Moffett's first contact with the Japanese lines nearly proved disastrous. His party was crossing a stone bridge in the dusk of the evening, when suddenly out of a neighboring house rushed four Japanese soldiers, who in an instant of time, with a click, click, click, click, brought to bear their

guns upon the party. Needless to say, the company stopped short, in danger of being shot for Chinese scouts. The faces of the guard wore a look of astonishment, over the barrels of their guns, as the tall form of Mr. Moffett, crowned by a tall, white, pith hat, loomed up out of the chair in which he had been riding. A parley was held. Their officer was called, and then his interpreter, who happily proved a Japanese druggist from Pyeng Yang, who knew Mr. Moffett. And as the result of his mediation a pass was procured which enabled the party to proceed through the lines in safety to Seoul.

His remaining thus with the Christians in Pyeng Yang until the last moment, while personally dangerous to himself, was no doubt in the end a help to the work, inasmuch as it gave Mr. Moffett a powerful hold upon the affections of those for whom he had ventured so much. From the time of the occupation of Pyeng Yang by the Chinese troops a large portion of its citizens fled to the country, among others the families of Christians. These few Christians in preparing their loads to go by boat, or making up the packs they were to sling upon their backs, invariably put in a parcel of Christian books. And then in the villages to which they went they followed the method they had seen pursued in Pyeng Yang and preached

the Gospel to every man they met, with the result that in those villages a number of people were converted, and still more became inquirers. Nor was this all. The three men mentioned above as inquirers in Soon An, 18 miles north from the city, went out preaching the truth in the villages all around their home; and a Mr. Yi of Pyeng Yang, who died subsequently of cholera, having taken refuge with his family from the alarms of war with Mr. Han of Anak, in the Whang Hai province, 70 miles from the city, he in company with Mr. Han went all through the region round about proclaiming the message of the Gospel; and from the work done at this time in these two regions to the north and south of Pyeng Yang began the movements which have added so many believers and inquirers in the villages of those respective districts.

Fifteen days after the battle Messrs. Hall, Lee and Moffett returned to Pyeng Yang. A pitiful sight met their eyes. Large portions of the city had been laid waste; on the plains round about and here and there through the city were strewn the dead bodies of Chinese soldiers and horses. Mr. Moffett's quarters they found had been looted by Japanese, while Dr. Hall's property and goods were intact, having been protected first by the Chinese and latterly by a Christian Japanese doc-

tor, whom they found in possession. The Japanese troops still occupied the city. The news of the arrival of the missionaries spread through the surrounding country in an incredibly short space of time; and large numbers of men with nothing but a little bundle slung over their backs came flocking into the city, invariably paying first a visit to the missionaries and inquiring, "Is it safe," and "What is the news," before returning to their ruined homes. For some time thereafter the movements of the missionaries were watched with breathless interest, and the day they returned to Seoul a large number of men packed up their little bundles and left the city too, so timorous were they and such confidence did they place in the judgment of the foreigner. The missionaries were astonished at the heartiness of the welcome they received upon this visit from Koreans of every class. Even men who had before opposed them now showed a friendly spirit. Previously the attitude of mind of the people of the city had been rather distant and suspicious; but now in the light of the sufferings they had experienced during the war, their eyes were opened to recognize the disinterestedness of the missionaries. Universally they seemed to have come to believe that they were the friends of the people, persons in whom they could put their trust, and from that

day to this the missionaries have experienced nothing but the utmost cordiality in Pyeng Yang upon the part of the Koreans. The change of atmosphere was especially noticeable in the number of inquirers who from this time kept coming to them in ever increasing numbers. Perhaps needless to say the fullest advantage of their opportunities was taken by both the missionaries and the Christians in pressing home the truths of the Gospel. During their visit in September, 1894, Messrs. Lee and Moffett repurchased the property which gave them such an excellent location and ample building space outside the city gate, which as I mentioned above they had returned to the original owners a year before. After a stay of one month in the pestilential city, the party returned to Seoul, and it was on the Japanese transport steamer going back that the noble hearted Dr. Hall contracted typhus fever, from the effects of which he passed to his reward a few days after his arrival in the capital.

Messrs. Lee and Moffett returned in January, 1895. This marked the permanent settlement of the station in Pyeng Yang, although it was not until May of the following year that, suitable quarters having been prepared, they were joined by Mr. Lee's family, when women's work received an impetus through the coming of Mrs. Lee and meetings

for women were begun. Mr. Moffett and Mr. Lee now settled down to their regular work, which consisted of daily, informal conversation with inquirers, instruction of Christians, the holding of regular services, wide circulation of Christian literature and frequent journeys to the surrounding country following up the work of the native Christians and gathering in the fruits from their seed-sowing. From that time until the present the spread of the spirit of inquiry through the city and in ever widening circles throughout the surrounding country has been something remarkable; and one of the most interesting features has been that each new convert has been seized with the spirit of the movement and from the time of his conversion has become an active agent in the spread of the truth among his neighbors and friends. And so the work has grown until the number of mission workers in the station is utterly inadequate for the proper guidance of the movement and suitable instruction of the converts and inquirers.

To be sure the station has grown somewhat. Since the summer of 1895 they have had for a colleague J. Hunter Wells, M. D., whose enthusiasm and skill in his profession have materially helped the work, he having medically treated this year 4,000 patients; and at the time of writing,

Rev. N. C. Whittemore and the bride of Dr. Wells have just arrived from home to join the station. But still the number is inadequate.

Allow me to quote from the report of Mr. Moffett made to the Annual Meeting of the Mission held in October, 1896, where he remarks: "I want to call attention to the fact that the native Christians have by word of mouth, and by printed page, and by the testimony of reformed lives, carried the Gospel into hundreds of towns and villages; and could we but follow this up I believe we should see a most remarkable movement in the ingathering of thousands of believers. The time is ripe and now is our opportunity. Could the Board send us new men to care for farther off regions in the north and in the Whang Hai province "(to the south)" the present members of the station could give their undivided time to the fifteen or twenty districts nearest Pyeng Yang and soon have this region dotted with churches in hundreds of villages."

It was in December, 1895, that, after the custom of the Presbyterian Missions of Korea, whose native work in the country districts is at present organized on the model of the "Nevins system," that is, self-supporting churches, under the care of unpaid leaders, who are chosen from the members, Messrs. Lee and Moffett were

holding their winter class of a month for the training of the leaders from the country villages, and of the helpers of the missionaries, and were taking them through a couple of the books of the New Testament, seeking at the same time to ground them in the faith and to stimulate their zeal for Christian work. Mrs. Isabella Bird Bishop, the distinguished traveller and authoress, happened at that time to visit Pyeng Yang, and what she saw of the winter class and of the Christian work in general in the city made a deep impression upon her. She has thus expressed herself with her gifted pen:

“I am bound to say that the needs of Korea, or rather the *openings* in Korea, have come to occupy a very outstanding place in my thoughts.”

. . . . “The Pyeng Yang work which I saw last winter, and which is still going on in much the same way, is the most impressive mission work I have seen in any part of the world. It shows that the Spirit of God still moves on the earth and that the old truths of sin, judgment to come, of the divine justice and love, of the atonement, and of the necessity for holiness, have the same power as in the apostolic days to transform the life of men. What I saw and heard there has greatly strengthened my own faith.” . . .

“Now a door is opened wide in Korea, how wide

only those can know who are on the spot. *Very many* are prepared to renounce devil worship and to worship the true God if only they are taught how, and large numbers more who have heard and received the Gospel are earnestly craving to be instructed in its rules of holy living." . . .

"I dread indescribably that unless *many men and women experienced in winning souls are sent speedily*, the door which the church declines to enter will close again, and that the last state of Korea will be worse than the first."

Since the visit of Mrs. Bishop to Pyeng Yang in the winter of 1895, when what she saw impressed her so much, the work of the church in that city has had a still more remarkable development. The membership within that time has grown three-fold, and the church building has had to be enlarged four times to meet the needs of the growing congregation, which now numbers nearly 500 people, with a prayer-meeting attendance of 150 men. To understand the growth and present status of the work in the north of Korea a few statistics may be in order. In the spring of 1894 in Pyeng Yang and its vicinity there were 10 baptized members of the church, with perhaps 40 catechumens. To the Annual Meeting of the Presbyterian Mission in October, 1895, there were reported an addition of 21 bap-

tized members and 180 catechumens, with two church buildings, one wholly and one partially provided by the Korean Christians, also two more churches under way. In October, 1896, for the same region there were reported to the mission an addition of 136 baptized members and 480 catechumens.

Including the work in the extreme north, centering in Eui Ju, the present enrollment of the whole station is 207 members, of whom 19 are women, and 503 catechumens, of whom 81 are women, with 22 preaching places, and contributions from the native congregations amounting to 325 yen. This year also has seen seven more church buildings provided wholly or with slight help by the Korean Christians. One word of Scripture explains this whole movement, "The *Gospel* is the power of God unto salvation."



